



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., tells first two Navajo NFR contestants that Navajo eyes are upon them

LAS VEGAS, Nev. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., on Thursday encouraged the first two Navajo cowboys competing at the National Finals Rodeo, telling them that the eyes of the Navajo Nation are on them and the people are with them.

That's what they're talking about, and that's what they're living today."

"You're doing something that has never been done before," the President said at a reception for bull rider Spud Jones and team roper Derrick Begay at the Mirage Hotel and Casino. "You're going into a world where Navajos have never tread. I think it's history in the making, and I didn't want to miss it for the world."

These cowboys join the ranks of professional Navajo athletes and competitors such as golfer Notah Begay, race car driver Cory Wetherill, and baseball player Jacoby Ellsbury.

President Shirley said the eyes Navajo youth and elders alike are focused on these cowboys at the 50th Wrangler National Finals Rodeo here this week.

"There are a lot of young eyes on you of young rodeo athletes," he said. "They have a prayer, too, and they have a hope. I know if Spud Jones can do it, I know if Derrick Begay can do it as Navajos, we can do it, too."



Spud Jones rides into history at the 50th Wrangler National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nev. Geri Hongeva Photo

He said throughout Navajoland, "the whole Navajo Nation is rooting for you. I know they're probably in every hogan that is out there, they're glued to their televisions."

Spud Jones is in third place in the overall average, with an 88.5-point ride on Dec. 8. Derrick Begay and his partner Victor Aros are in 15th place in the team roping average.



Derrick Begay is honored at reception in Las Vegas sponsored by the Navajo Nation Parks & Recreation Dept. on Dec. 5. From left to right are Parks & Rec Dept. Manager Ray Russell, President Shirley, and Navajo Nation Resources Committee Chairman George Arthur.

President Shirley also expressed his gratitude to the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Dept. and its manager, Ray Russell, for sponsoring the reception for the cowboys.

Derrick told those at the reception that competing in the biggest show in rodeo is awesome.

"It's unbelievable," he said. "There's no other feeling in the world like it right now. It's amazing."

The President said that both cowboys are already champions.

"We want you to know we're very proud of you, as are your parents, your communities, and the great Navajo Nation," he said. "There are no impossibilities. There are only challenges. That's the teaching from our elders. But you're already here, and I'm sure it's because of those teachings."

"In 2002, I predicted that within 10 years, the Navajo Nation would have a Navajo contestant competing in the PRCA National Finals Rodeo," Mr. Russell said. "Here we are, in less than 10 years."

The President said the department is responsible for bringing great rodeo and great cowboys and cowgirls to the Navajo Nation every year.

"It's always an honor to have you make footprints on Navajo soil back home," he said to the other professional cowboys there.

To keep track of how the Navajo cowboys are doing, go to: www.prorodeo.com